

Lewis and Clark's Return Split-up by Tom Laidlaw

While at Fort Clatsop, Lewis and Clark looked at their maps and realized they could save a considerable distance on the way back. As a matter of fact, on the westward journey they had been told by the Indians near Traveler's Rest that the Nez Perce "Road to the Buffalo" would take them over the mountains and to the Great Falls in four days. They had spent 57 days going south, over Lemhi Pass, then north again to Traveler's Rest. Many historians point to this as a mistake or miscalculation, but it was by design. After the mission, Clark wrote a letter to his brother, George Rogers Clark, in which he stated "Not having met with any of the natives of the Rocky Mountains we were of course ignorant of the passes by land which existed through these mountains to the Columbia River, and had we even known the route we were destitute of horses which would have been indispensably necessary to enable us to transport the requisite quantity of ammunition and other stores to ensure the success of the remaining part of our voyage down the Columbia." (LLC v1, 327).

On July 1st Lewis lays out the scheme in detail: "Capt. Clark and myself consuted the following plan viz. I determined to go with a small party by the most direct route to the falls of the Missouri, there to leave Thompson, MacNeal, and Goodrich to prepare carriages and gear for the purpose of transporting the canoes and baggage over the portage, and myself and six volunteers to ascend Maria's river in order to determine if any branch of it lies as far north as 50 degrees." (Moulton 8, 74). The volunteers were Drewyer, Joseph & Reuben Fields, Werner, Frazier, and Sergeant Gass. **Clark** would take the rest back to Camp Fortunate, reclaim the canoes and caches that had been left there the previous August and retrace their way down the Jefferson River to the Three Forks. From there **Sgt. Ordway** would take a party of 9 down to the Great Falls. **Clark** would take 10 by land over to the Yellowstone River, build a canoe and float that river to its confluence with the Missouri. **Sgt. Pryor** was to take three men overland with the horses to the Mandan villages.

So from Traveler's Rest the parties were:

Lewis, Drewyer, Field, Field, **Gass**, Werner, Frazier, Thompson, MacNeal, Goodrich, Seaman, **17 horses. Ten were stolen, but three recovered** so Lewis took only Drewyer and the Field brothers and **6 horses** to explore the Marias. The two worst and two best were left with Gass's party to help with the portage.

Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Gibson, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, **Ordway**, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard, **Pryor**, Shannon, Hall, Windsor, **49 horses and one colt**, went to **Camp Fortunate**, by a different route than 1805. They dug up their caches, found one canoe ruined, took its nails, and proceeded down the Beaverhead to Wisdom (Big Hole) River where they found the canoe that had been left there the previous August. They stripped this canoe of nails and iron and proceeded down the Jefferson River to **Three Forks**, where they split into their assigned groups. **6 canoes, 49 horses, 1 colt**.

From Three Forks Clark took Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Gibson, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, **Pryor**, Shannon, Hall, and Windsor, **49 horses and one colt** over today's Bozeman Pass to the Yellowstone River near Park City, MT, where he built **two dugout canoes, lashed them together for stability** and took off down the Yellowstone, after assigning **Pryor**, Shannon, Hall, and Windsor to take the horses by land to try to make a deal with Hugh Heney of the Hudson's Bay Company at the Mandan Villages. The horses would shortly be "captured" by the Crow Indians, whereupon **Pryor** and his men made **two bullboats** and launched them on the Yellowstone River at Pompey's Pillar. **Clark** reached the Missouri River on **Aug. 3**, but went ahead without Lewis because of mosquitoes. **Pryor** caught up with him on **Aug. 8**.

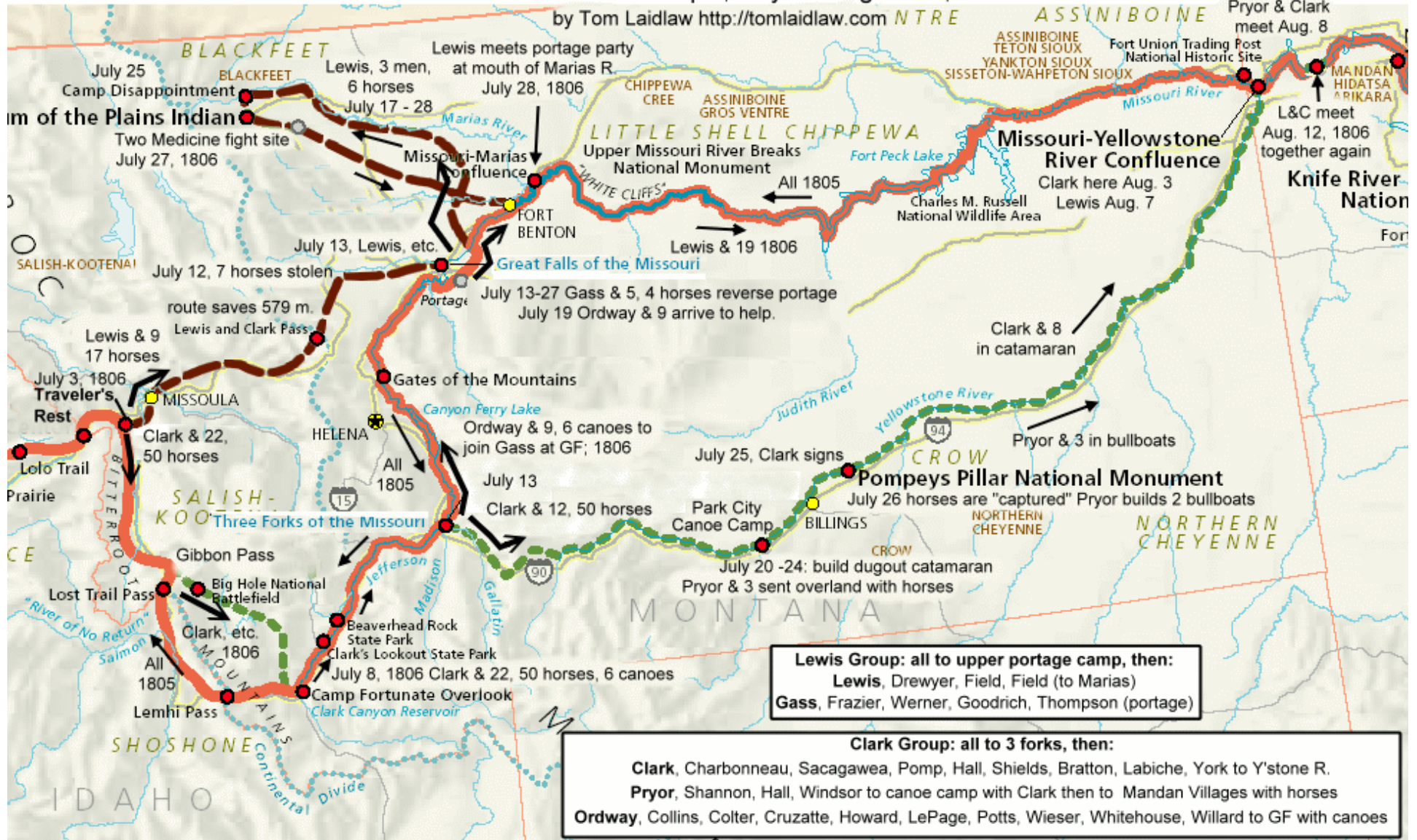
From Three Forks Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, and Willard took the **6 canoes** downriver to Great Falls, where they met with **Gass**, Werner, Frazier, Thompson, MacNeal, and Goodrich, whom **Lewis** had left with **4 horses** to prepare the portage trucks, etc. This combined group dug up the caches and made the portage, picking up the **White Pirogue**, but abandoning one of the canoes.

On July 17, Lewis, the Field brothers, Drewyer and **6 horses** headed northwest to survey the Marias River. Turning back when he felt no tributary of the Marias headed as far north as 50° **Lewis** named the place Camp Disappointment. On the return down the Two Medicine River Lewis's party got into a fight with some Blackfoot Indians killing two of them and gaining a few horses. A mad dash of 120 miles in 24 hours brought them back to the Missouri a few miles above Maria's River on **July 28**, where they met the portage group just coming down river. All the horses were then "given their final discharge" and Lewis's group dug up the caches, found the Red Pirogue rotten, but took its nails and ironwork. They then continued down the Missouri and caught up with Clark on **Aug. 12**, where they abandoned the 2 bullboats. At the Mandan villages they picked up the Mandan Chief Sheheke, discharged Charbonneau and released Colter early to go trapping with two Illinois trappers. The Corps of Discovery reached St. Louis **Sept 23, 1806**. Clark later wrote that the return shortcut saved 579 miles (**8, 388**). A pretty considerable savings. On the reverse is a chart which I hope will help you understand this return spit-up. It tells the same story in a little different way. Also see *The Transportation of Lewis and Clark*. **Tom Laidlaw**

From Traveler's Rest July 3, 1806				
Lewis		Clark		
Lewis, Thompson, MacNeal, Goodrich, Drewyer, Field, Field, Werner, Frazier, Gass, Seaman, 17 horses. Short cut		Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Hall, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard, Pryor, Shannon, Gibson, Windsor, 49 horses and 1 colt		
Great Falls (July 13-27, 1806)		Camp Fortunate (July 8, 1806)		
Recover caches, some damaged. Iron boat frame in good order, but what did they do with it? 10 horses stolen, but 3 recovered.	Gass, Frazier, Werner, MacNeal, Goodrich, Thompson, 4 horses Preparing for reverse portage	Same 23 people, 49 horses, 1 colt, 6 canoes.		
		Three Forks (July 13, 1806)		
July 17 Lewis goes to survey Maria's River Lewis, J. Field, R. Field, Drewyer, Seaman, 6 horses	Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard, 6 canoes		Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Hall, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, Pryor, Shannon, Gibson, Windsor, 49 horses, 1 colt. 24 horses were stolen July 20	
	Great Falls (July 19-27)		Yellowstone River (July 21, 1806) Clark builds catamaran near Park City, MT	
	Gass, Frazier, Werner, MacNeal, Goodrich, Thompson. Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard. This group performs the portage, pick up White Pirogue, leave 1 canoe.		Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Gibson, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, 1 dugout catamaran	Pryor, Shannon, Hall,, Windsor, 25 horses, 1 colt, bound overland to Mandans. All horses stolen. Pryor builds 2 bullboats at
July 22 –25 (Cut Bank, MT) Camp Disappointment	Downstream Portage (completed on July 27)		Missouri R. (Aug. 3) Clark camps in point, but bugs drive him to leave without waiting for Lewis 1 dugout catamaran	
	Frazier, Werner, MacNeal, Goodrich, Thompson. Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, 5 canoes, White Pirogue.		Pompy's Tower (July 26) Pryor, Shannon, Hall, Windsor, 2 bullboats	
2 Medicine R. 7/ 26-27	Gass and Willard take the 4 horses on the north side of the Missouri to the Teton River & down to the Marias.		Missouri R. (8/8) Pryor's group joins Clark	
Fight with Blackfeet. Gain several horses			Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Gibson, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, Pryor, Shannon, Hall, Windsor, 1 dugout catamaran, 2 bullboats	
Parties rejoin at Maria's confluence with Missouri R. (July 28)				
Lewis, J. Field, R. Field, Drewyer, Gass, Frazier, Werner, MacNeal, Goodrich, Thompson. Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard, Recover cache at Maria's R., but much damaged, Red Pirogue unusable, strip her of nails. Let horses go. 5 canoes, White Pirogue				
Missouri River downstream of Yellowstone (Aug. 12) Lewis joins Clark. All together again.				
Lewis, J. Field, R. Field, Drewyer, Gass, Frazier, Werner, MacNeal, Goodrich, Thompson. Ordway, Collins, Colter, Cruzatte, Howard, LePage, Potts, Wieser, Whitehouse, Willard, Clark, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, Pomp, Gibson, Shields, Bratton, Labiche, York, Pryor, Shannon, Hall, Windsor, Bullboats abandoned. - 1 dugout catamaran, 5 canoes, White Pirogue.				
Aug. 20 (Mandan Villages) – Discharge Charbonneau Family & Colter; pick up Sheheke, et. al.; another catamaran made from 2 of the canoes, 2 dugout catamarans, 3 canoes, White Pirogue				
Sept. 20 – one catamaran set adrift so 1 dugout catamaran, 3 canoes, White Pirogue to end at Saint Louis – Sept. 23, 1806				

Lewis and Clark Return Split, July 3 - August 12, 1806

by Tom Laidlaw <http://tomlaidlaw.com> NTR



At one time the party was split 5 ways. Many writers have criticized Lewis for letting this happen, but it was a tribute to their confidence. Of course most of the horses were stolen, and there was the regrettable incident at Two Medicine River. But if 7 of Lewis' horses had not been stolen, he would have taken six men with him to investigate the Marias instead of three, and the incident might not have happened. The most amazing thing about the split was the portage party appearing at the Marias River within minutes of Lewis. And all the additional exploration they did makes me believe they didn't give two hoots about a ride back on a ship. They were the first whites to explore most of the territory and they were well aware of the kind of history they were making. After all, they were THE CORPUS OF VOLUNTEERS FOR NORTHWESTERN DISCOVERY. Base map: <http://www.nps.gov/carto/PDF/LECLmap1.pdf>